



NEWS RELEASE

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NRCS New Watershed Assessments Prove Popular

Colorado's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has recently published seven Rapid Watershed Assessments (RWA). The assessments were developed to help facilitate key land use decisions as they provide initial estimates of where conservation investments would best address the concerns of landowners, conservation districts, and other community organizations and stakeholders. A total of 94 Colorado assessments are slated for completion by 2010.

Watersheds are the areas of land that catch rain and snow and drain or seeps into a marsh, stream, river, lake or groundwater. Homes, farms, ranches, forests, small towns, big cities and more can make up a watershed. Just as a creek flows into a river, no matter how large or small, a watershed is nearly always part of a larger watershed.

"It's important to understand what makes up a watershed and what they are," says Frank Riggle, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Water Resources, Lakewood, CO. "The understanding of watersheds lends itself to realizing the importance of an assessment of one. Understanding watersheds make people begin to realize that everyone lives down stream from something or someone."

NRCS' assessments not only help landowners and local leaders set priorities and determine the best actions to achieve their goals, they also provide the foundation to make targeted and informed decisions that will help conserve natural resources. Assessments contain the best readily-available data, including a general description of the location, size and political units associated with the watershed; a physical description including land use/land cover, precipitation/climate, common resource areas, stream flow data, land capability, etc.; known resource concerns; census and social data; status and history of resource conservation in the watershed; and reference sources.

"We're very excited about these products because they contain so much vital information and are beneficial to land users, decision makers and natural resources," Riggle goes on to say. Each RWA contains information about the current level of conservation within the watershed, identifies suites of appropriate conservation practices needed to manage primary resource concerns for each major land use, and a summary of the various costs associated with the resource management system developed in suites identified in previous step.

"The information in these assessments is vast and compiling it takes a cooperative and collaborative effort," Riggle further states. "NRCS uses our wide range of partners to ensure we have the most accurate and timely information to develop these products."

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Most of the data for the RWAs was collected through the National Land Cover Data Set, NRCS National Resources Inventory, Census of Agriculture, and numerous Colorado state agencies including the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts, the State Conservation Board of the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Colorado State University. Local NRCS and partnership employee field staffs assisted in the compilation and verification of the data.

For additional information about Colorado's rapid watershed assessments, please visit <http://www.co.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/WaterRes/RWA/RWAmapping.html>

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